

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 320
By Henry

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Ms. Martha Ragland of Nashville.

WHEREAS, it was with great sorrow and a profound sense of loss that the members of this General Assembly learned of the death of a distinguished and beloved Tennessean, Ms. Martha Ragland of Nashville; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Ragland will live eternally in the hearts and minds of many, as she was undoubtedly one of the most celebrated political activists our great state has ever produced, and one of the greatest civil rights leaders of the twentieth century; and

WHEREAS, a native of Kentucky, Ms. Ragland began her colorful life in Nashville as a student at Vanderbilt University, earning both her bachelor's and master's degrees in economics there; and

WHEREAS, a lauded academic achiever, Ms. Ragland's thesis on immigration took her to New York, where she worked and did research for a Yale University professor; and

WHEREAS, our state was most fortunate as Ms. Ragland returned to Tennessee in 1932 to marry Tom Ragland, her husband of nearly 64 years; and

WHEREAS, very concerned about the plight of American women in the first half of this century, Ms. Ragland distinguished herself as both a "rebel" and "reformer" of causes, emerging as a champion of such causes as public health, child care, birth control education, legislative reform, early childhood education, the League of Women Voters and Democratic politics; and

WHEREAS, a knowledgeable observer has said that Ms. Ragland “was Tennessee’s first modern-day feminist” and “a trailblazer in every sense of the word and she spoke out when others could not find their voice”; and

WHEREAS, while living in Nashville, then in Knoxville and Chattanooga in the 1930s and 1940s, Ms. Ragland began her campaign for change; one of her first efforts involved traveling across Tennessee with esteemed birth control pioneer, Margaret Sanger, to promote birth control education in public health clinics; and

WHEREAS, a source of knowledge and wisdom for women’s issues and an effective leader in her own right, Ms. Ragland embarked on a successful campaign to revive the Tennessee League of Women Voters, a worthy organization that disbanded after the passage of women’s suffrage in 1920; and

WHEREAS, serving as state president of the League in 1945, she spearheaded efforts to strengthen the Tennessee Constitution by calling for the formation of a commission to study possible revision; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Ragland won acclaim for her deft and dexterous organization of statewide campaigns; she served effectively as campaign organizer and speech writer for the late Senator Estes Kefauver and gave generously of her time and talents to Senator Albert Gore, Sr.’s 1952 campaign and subsequent reelection campaigns; and

WHEREAS, living a life dedicated to the pursuit of good government and ethical politics, Ms. Ragland leaves behind such legacies as the Volunteers Women’s Roundtable and the Nashville Women’s Political Caucus; and

WHEREAS, one of Ms. Ragland’s most adroit qualities included her uncommon ability to motivate other women to realize their full potential, perhaps the most valuable of all skills; she was a mentor in every sense of the word, helping to build not only women’s careers, but also their character, confidence, and self-esteem; and

WHEREAS, in recognition of her exceptional efforts as a political and social activist and a career that spanned seven decades, Ms. Ragland was honored as part of last year's traveling exhibit showcasing the accomplishments of women leaders in celebration of the 75th anniversary of suffrage; included in this exhibit, along with Ms. Ragland, were such renowned leaders as Fannie Lou Harmen, Eleanor Roosevelt and Carrie Chapman; and

WHEREAS, Ms. Ragland is survived by her loving husband, Tom Ragland, one daughter, Sandra Demson, and five grandchildren; a son, Tommy Ragland, preceded her in death; and

WHEREAS, it is only appropriate that this body express its heartfelt condolences to the many friends and family of this exceptional lady; although Martha Ragland has relinquished this life for a far better existence, the legacy of her courage and perseverance, tempered with skill and intellect, will live forever in the history of our great state; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE NINETY-NINTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, That we pause to mourn the passing of Ms. Martha Ragland, while we also celebrate the life of this great woman as one of the most public-spirited and compassionate Tennesseans ever.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.